Numb. 18

The TATLER.

By *Isaac Bickerstaff* Esq;

Quicquid agunt Homines nostri Farrago Libelli.

From *Thursday May* 19. to *Saturday May* 21. 1709.

From my own Apartment, May 20.

IT is obſerv'd too often, that Men of Wit do ſo much employ their Thoughts upon fine Speculations, That Things uſeful to Mankind are wholly neglected; and they are buſy in making Emendations upon ſome Enclitick in a *Greek* Author, while obvious Things, that every Man may have uſe for, are wholly overlook'd. It would be an happy Thing, if ſuch as have real Capacities for publick Service, were employ'd in Works of general Uſe; but becauſe a Thing is every Body's Buſineſs, it is no Body's Buſineſs: This is for Want of publick Spirit. As for my Part, who am only a Student, and a Man of no great Intereſt, I can only remark Things, and recommend the Correction of 'em to higher Powers. There is an Offence I have a Thouſand Times lamented, but fear I ſhall never ſee remedied, and that is, That in a Nation where Learning is ſo frequent as in *Great Britain*, there ſhould be ſo many groſs Errors as there are in the very Directions of Things, wherein Accuracy is neceſſary for the Conduct of Life. This is notoriouſly obſerved by all Men of Letters when they firſt come to Town (at which Time they are uſually curious that Way) in the Inſcriptions on Sign-Poſts. I have cauſe to know this Matter as well as any Body; for I have (when I went to Merchant Taylor's School) ſuffer'd Stripes for ſpelling after the Signs I obſerv'd in my Way; tho at the ſame Time, I muſt confeſs, ſtaring at thoſe Inſcriptions firſt gave me an Idea and Curioſity for Medals, in which I have ſince arriv'd to ſome Knowledge. Many a Man has loſt his Way and his Dinner by this general Want of Skill in Orthography: For, conſidering that the Painters are uſually ſo very bad, that you cannot know the Animal under whoſe Sign you are to live that Day, How muſt the Stranger be miſled, if it be wrong ſpelt, as well as ill painted? I have a Couſin now in Town, who has anſwer'd Under-Batchellor at *Queen's* College, whoſe Name is *Humphrey Mapſhaft*: (He is a Kin to us by his Mother.) This young Man going to ſee a Relation in *Barbican*, wander'd a whole Day by the Miſtake of one Letter; for it was written, *This is the B E E R*, inſtead of, *This is the B E A R*. He was ſet right at laſt, by enquiring for the Houſe, of a Fellow who could not read, and knew the Place mechanically, only by having been often drunk there. But, in the Name of Goodneſs, let us make our Learning of Uſe to us, or not. Was not this a Shame, that a Philoſopher ſhould be thus directed by a Cobler? I'll be ſworn, if it were known how many have ſuffer'd in this Kind by falſe Speeling ſince the Union, this Matter would not long lie thus. What makes theſe Evils the more inſupportable, is, that they are ſo eaſily amended, and nothing done in it. But it is ſo far from that, that the Evil goes on in other Arts as well as Orthography. Places are confounded as well for Want of proper Diſtinctions, as Things for Want of true Characters. Had I not come by the other Day very early in the Morning, there might have been Miſchief done; for a worthy *North-Briton* was ſwearing at *Stocks-Market*, that they would not let him in at his Lodgings; but I knowing the Gentleman, and obſerving him look often at the King on Horſeback, and then double his Oaths, that he was ſure he was right, found he miſtook that for *Charing-Croſs*, by the Erection of the like Statue in each Place. I grant, private Men may diſtinguiſh their Abodes as they pleaſe; as one of my Acquaintance, who lives at *Marybone*, has put a good Sentence of his own Invention upon his Dwelling-place, to find out where he lives: He is ſo near *London*, that his Conceit is this, *The Country in Town*; or, *The Town in the Country*; for you muſt know, if they are both in one, they are all one. Beſides that, the Ambiguity is not of great Conſequence, if you are ſafe at the Place, 'tis no Matter if you do not diſtinctly know where to ſay the Place is. But to return to the Orthography of Publick Places; I propoſe, That every Tradeſman in the Cities of *London* and *Weſtminſter*, ſhall give me Sixpence a Quarter for keeping their Signs in repair, as to the Grammatical Part; and I will take into my Houſe a *Swiſs* Count of my Acquaintance, who can remember all their Names without Book, for Diſpatch-ſake, ſetting up the Head of the ſaid Foreigner for my Sign; the Features being ſtrong, and fit for hanging high.

St. James's Coffee-houſe, May 20.

This Day a Mail arriv'd from *Holland*, by which there are Advices from *Paris*, That the Kingdom of *France* is in the utmoſt Miſery and Diſtraction. The Merchants of *Lions* have been at Court, to remonſtrate their great Sufferings by the Failure of their publick Credit; but have receiv'd no other Satisfaction, than Promiſes of a ſudden Peace; and that their Debts will be made good by Funds out of the Revenue, which will not anſwer, but in caſe of the Peace which is promiſed. In the mean Time, the Cries of the common People are loud for Want of Bread, the Gentry have loſt all Spirit and Zeal for their Country, and the King himſelf ſeems to languiſh under the Anxiety of the preſſing Calamities of the Nation, and retires from hearing thoſe Grievances, which he hath not Power to redreſs. Inſtead of Preparations for War, and the Defence of their Country, there is nothing to be ſeen but evident Marks of a general Deſpair. Proceſſions, Faſtings, Publick Mournings, and Humiliations, are become the ſole Employments of a People, who were lately the moſt vain and gay of any in the Univerſe.

The Pope has written to the *French* King on the Subject of a Peace, and his Majeſty has anſwer'd in the lowlieſt Terms, That he entirely ſubmits his Affairs to Divine Providence, and ſhall ſoon ſhow the

the World, that he prefers the Tranquility of his People to the Glory of his Arms, and Extent of his Conquests.

Letters from the *Hague* of the 24th say, That his Excellency the Lord *Townshend* deliver'd his Credentials on that Day to the States General, as Plenipotentiary from the Queen of *Great-Britain*; as did also Count *Zinzendorf*, who bears the same Character from the Emperor.

Prince *Eugene* intended to set out the next Day for *Brussels*, and his Grace the Duke of *Marlborough* on the *Tuesday* following. The Marquis *de Torci* talks daily of going, but still continues here. The Army of the Allies is to assemble on the 7th of the next Month at *Helchin*; tho' 'tis generally believ'd, that the Preliminaries to a Treaty are fully adjusted.

The Approach of a Peace strikes a Pannick thro' our Armies, tho' that of a Battel could never do it, and they almost repent of their Bravery, that made such Haste to humble themselves and the *French* King. The Duke of *Marlborough*, tho' otherwise the greatest General of the Age, has plainly shown himself unacquainted with the Arts of Husbanding a War. He might have grown as old as the Duke of *Alva*, or Prince *Wallaeck*, in the *Low Countries*, and yet have got Reputation enough every Year for any reasonable Man: For the Command of General in *Flanders* hath been ever look'd upon as a Provision for Life. For my Part, I can't see how his Grace can answer it to the World, for the great Eagerness he hath shown to send a Hundred Thousand of the bravest Fellows in *Europe* a begging. But the private Gentlemen of the Infantry will be able to shift for themselves; a brave Man can never starve in a Country stock'd with Hen-roosts. *There is not a Yard of Linen*, says my honour'd Progenitor Sir *John Falstaff*, *in my whole Company; but as for that*, says this worthy Knight, *I am in no great Pain, we shall find Shirts on every Hedge.* There is another Sort of Gentlemen whom I am much more concern'd for, and that is, the ingenious Fraternity of which I have the Honour to be an unworthy Member; I mean the *News-Writers* of *Great Britain*, whether *Post-Men* or *Post-Boys*, or by what other Name or Title soever dignified or distinguish'd. The Case of these Gentlemen is, I think, more hard than that of the Soldiers, considering that they have taken more Towns, and fought more Battels. They have been upon Parties and Skirmishes, when our Armies have lain still; and given the General Assault to many a Place, when the Besiegers were quiet in their Trenches. They have made us Masters of several strong Towns many Weeks before our Generals could do it; and compleated Victories, when our greatest Captains have been glad to come off with a drawn Battel. Where Prince *Eugene* has slain his Thousands, *Boyer* has slain his Ten Thousands. This Gentleman can indeed be never enough commended for his Courage and Intrepidity during this whole War: He has laid about him with an inexpressible Fury, and, like the offended *Marius* of Ancient *Rome*, made such Havock among his Countrymen, as must be the Work of two or three Ages to repair. It must be confess'd, the Redoubled Mr. *Buckley* has shed as much Blood as the former; but I cannot forbear saying, (and I hope it will not look like Envy) that we regard our Brother *Buckley* as a kind of *Drancansir*, who spares neither Friend or Foe, but generally kills as many of his own Side as the Enemy's. It is impossible for this ingenious Sort of Men to subsist after a Peace: Every one remembers the Shifts they were driven to in the Reign of King *Charles* the Second, when they could not furnish out a single Paper of News, without lighting up a Comet in *Germany*, or a Fire in *Moscow*. There scarce appear'd a Letter without a Paragraph on an Earthquake. Prodigies were grown so familiar, that they had lost their Name, as a great Poet of that Age has it. I remember Mr. *Dyer*, who is justly look'd upon by all the Fox-hunters in the Nation as the greatest Statesman our Country has produc'd, was particularly famous for dealing in Whales, insomuch that in Five Months Time (for I had the Curiosity to examine his Letters on that Occasion) he brought Three into the Mouth of the River *Thames*, besides Two Porpusses and a Sturgeon. The judicious and wary Mr. *I. Dawks* hath all along been the Rival of this great Writer, and got himself a Reputation from Plagues and Famine, by which, in those Days, he destroy'd as great Multitudes, as he has lately done by the Sword. In every Dearth of News, *Grand Cairo* was sure to be unpeopled.

It being therefore visible, that our Society will be greater Sufferers by the Peace than the Soldiery it self; insomuch, that the *Daily Courant* is in Danger of being broken, my Friend *Dyer* of being reform'd, and the very best of the whole Band of being reduc'd to Half-Pay: Might I presume to offer any Thing in the Behalf of my distress'd Brethren, I would humbly move, That an Appendix of proper Apartments should be furnish'd with Pen, Ink, and Paper, and other Necessaries of Life, should be added to the Hospital of *Chelsea*, for the Relief of such decay'd *News-Writers* as have serv'd their Country in the Wars; and that for their Exercise, they should compile the Annals of their Brother-Veterans, who have been engag'd in the same Service, and are still oblig'd to do Duty after the same Manner.

I cannot be thought to speak this out of an Eye to any private Interest; for, as my chief Scenes of Action are Coffee-houses, Play-houses, and my own Apartment, I am in no Need of Camps, Fortifications, and Fields of Battel, to support me; I don't call out for Heroes and Generals to my Assistance. Tho' the Officers are broken, and the Armies disbanded, I shall still be safe as long as there are Men or Women, or Politicians, or Lovers, or Poets, or Nymphs, or Swains, or Cits, or Courtiers, in Being.

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